

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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Ranking Member Robert Garcia
Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs
Hearing on “Ensuring Force Readiness: Examining Progressivism’s Impact on an All-Volunteer Military”
March 28, 2023

Our national security is critical to protecting our great nation, the lives and safety of Americans, and ensuring our democratic values and institutions remain strong.

As part of our national security strategy, we must ensure that our military is not politicized for partisan purposes. Instead of holding hearings on fake and polarizing issues such as “progressivism” we should be taking steps that actually support men and women in uniform. Unfortunately, my Republican colleagues did not invite any witnesses from the Department of Defense to testify on the challenges their department faces.

This powerful Committee could be championing policies conducting oversight that get at the root causes of diminishing recruitment and retention in our armed service, such as the implementation of the “I Am Vanessa Guillen Act,” which seeks to help and protect victims of sexual violence in the military; the need for improved mental health support for our servicemembers; the need for reliable and affordable childcare for our warfighters who are deployed on a moment’s notice; and so much more.

Data and evidence show that sexual assault, mental health care, and affordable child care are all real factors that affect military recruitment, retention, and readiness. But none of those real factors are what my Republican colleagues have chosen as worthy of their ‘oversight’ today.

Instead, we are spending our time boosting culture war stories from Fox News hosts and conservative pundits – who have decided that the most powerful military on earth has somehow become “weak” because it is “woke.”

As some of our most senior military leaders have pointed out, these attacks only undermine and politicize a fundamental national institution.

In the words of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley, “I personally find it offensive that we are accusing the United States military [...] of being ‘woke’ or something else because we’re studying some theories that are out there.” I fully agree with the words of General Milley that our warfighters should be “open-minded and be widely read” because they “come from the American people.”

Here are the facts. America is not the same as it was in the 1960s. We are recruiting from a generation of young people who are the most diverse in American history. We need to draw on their talents, now more than ever. The United States military needs all of our best and brightest, including women, LGBTQ+, and individuals of all races, religions and backgrounds. If we close off military service to people who are willing

and able to serve our country—who are willing and able to uphold the ideals of American democracy—we make ourselves weaker.

We must also ensure that we retain the service members that we recruit. Meaning we have to address the fact that military service is in many ways, “incongruent with the modern family” where both parents likely work and must endure frequent unpredictable deployments that separate families and moves that can threaten family stability and prompt unemployment.

At the same time, the needs of our military are changing. Some of my GOP colleagues claim that so-called “wokeism” or “progressivism” are to blame for today’s challenges with recruitment and retention. The data, however, do not back up that claim. A recent poll by the U.S. Army found that so-called “wokeness” is cited by only 5 percent of prospective recruits as a reason to not join the military.

Instead, the research shows that the top concerns for would-be military recruits are about putting life “on hold,” death, injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and emotional stressors.

Research also shows that our military “high brass” is not particularly diverse. African Americans make up 19 percent of active-duty enlistments, but only 6.5 percent of generals. African Americans are especially underrepresented at the three- and four-star general level, where the most important decisions are made.

Democrats are committed to our national security. We need to understand that we are stronger when we can lead—stronger with our allies and partners, rather than standing alone. The global footprint of our modern military and of our allies and partners requires a diversity of ideas, backgrounds, and capabilities—all working to support the protection of our democratic values.

President Biden is leading the push to modernize our military and advance our democratic values.

Real American strength is helping each other. We need to draw on everyone’s talents to build a better America. We are not going to turn back the clock on our society or on our military. Doing so would threaten our national security and make Americans less safe.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and I hope that going forward my colleagues choose to engage in oversight that makes our military stronger instead of further pushing it down a path of politicization.

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